

Title: Walking towards the Sun – a quest of Hong Kong's colonial archives

Name: Dorothy Tsz Yan Cheung

Student number: 0948773

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Adviser: Marloes de Valk

Second Reader: Kate Briggs

**Forward**

This is a personal archive built around the year I worked on the short film project on the Hong Kong archives in London. It consists of notes about the field trips I made to London and Northern Ireland, an introduction to the Hong Kong archives, books and films read during the research as well as the process of writing the script. The documents are put in a way resembling the archiving system in the National Archives of London, where the latest documents are filed on top. Even so, a reader is welcome to read in any ways as one wishes.

## 0.0 Introduction

Extraction of a pitch done in Queer and Migrant Film Festival in Amsterdam, NL. Dec 2018. Before I pitch on my short documentary “*Walking towards the Sun*”, I want to talk about a little piece of memory I reclaimed recently.

I remember as a kid born in late 80s, I learned about the handover of Hong Kong from the UK to the Chinese government in very early age – first it was a number 1, 9, 9, 7, 1997, that everyone talked about, then it was seeing childhood friends moving away to some faraway places - Canada or Australia, and they never came back. I asked my mom, “And what about us?”

Then I vaguely remember my mother once told me someday the government might move us all to Ireland.

Many years have passed, we ended up staying in Hong Kong, I had almost forgotten all this. Until one day last year, I came across the news online, it is not really “news” but the discovery of a document in 1983 - a scholar suggested uprooting the whole Hong Kong population to Northern Ireland.



Then I realised that it was not merely a vague memory but someone really said that, black on white, on paper, in an archive, and that it imprinted itself on a kid’s mind and stays with her for 20 years after handover.

The handover also took away sensitive archives related to the negotiation between China and the UK on the future of Hong Kong – they were being moved to London, and we never knew what was being discussed.

We all lost that memory, in our mind, and in physical form, or maybe we have not been allowed to have that memory. And I realised I am not the only one curious about the history – Or maybe a simple question, what has actually happened?

I came across an initiative called “Decoding Hong Kong’s History”, that was set up after the internationally known “Umbrella Movement”. There are students and people in London who spend their own time, travel for an hour or more to the National Archives, and scanning the documents concerning all these important decisions – they send it back to Hong Kong and so people can read and study them.

To me, this is activism – a quiet activism to say our never-spoken memory and past loud to the world, and to ourselves.

I guess we all have that in our minds all the time: what if we had known something earlier? How does information affect the way we make decision and see ourselves? Would it make any difference to our future? How does information become memory? And how does memory become us?

In this age when we talk about fact checking and fake news more than ever, growing up as a colonized person, and as a lesbian, the struggle was – no fact, no news, nothing – there is this great fear of being kept in the dark. The film touches on colonialism, censorship and personal memory. And now in the age of fake news, this fear simply creeps into everyone's life.

The film is not merely a film that speaks to people, about what happened but functions as a spark to make people do something, that would change our future, and I wish to have your support to make that change happen.

## **0.1 First Field Visit to London (18 Oct 2018 to 28 Oct 2018)**

### **0.1.1 National Archives**

#### **0.1.1.1 A Courage to Let Go**

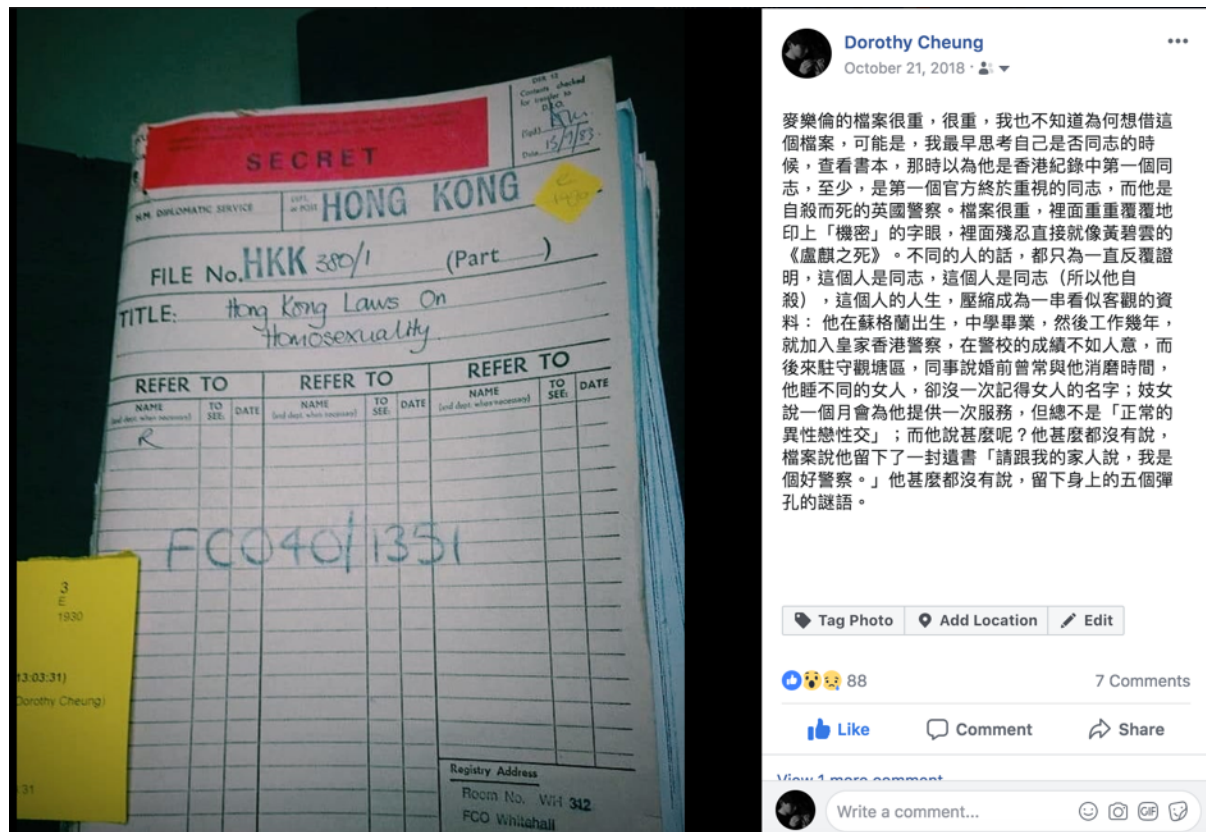
I meet the Hong Kong team of Decoding Hong Kong's History. They are conducting research in London at that period in the National Archives in Kew's Garden, alongside with other Volunteers who are based in London. Below is a text I write in the evening:

[...] they had a veggie burger and fish and chips with peas. One of them recently moved to London, he said his family is here anyway - so he made the decision to leave Hong Kong. Another man is a researcher based in Hong Kong, he was struggling if he should study in London after talking about it for 6 years. "If you have considered well enough, then just do it. After all, I am braver [than you] - since I have given up everything in Hong Kong and come here." The first man said.

I wonder if this documentation of a conversation during lunch is important for anyone, but I am still thinking about it even on the way to my host's home. Why letting go is courageous? Can hold on to something be courageous as well? If the archive was a person, she would have been a persistent and stubborn one, while her name (archives) came from the Greek word "arkhe", that means *commencement* and *commandment*. (Derrida 1995) There is no wonder that I am so determined to preserve this first encounter, even it might have no meanings for others.

### 0.1.1.2 MacLennan

The scanner app cannot run on my phone, so I decide to read a file for my own interest. I search homosexuality and Hong Kong, and the search engine points me to a file with the title “Hong Kong Laws on Homosexuality”. It consists of a pile of documents on the case of MacLennan in 1980. John MacLennan, a Scottish policeman served in the Royal Hong Kong Police, found dead in his apartment with 5 gunshots in his chest in 1980.



The file of MacLennan is very heavy, I don't know why I would want to call this file, maybe because while I first questioned if I am a *Tongzhi* [an umbrella term for LGBTQ in Chinese speaking communities] and read, I perceived him as the first documented *Tongzhi* in Hong Kong's record [...] and he was a police officer from the United Kingdom. The files are very heavy and printed “confidential” all over, the content is as brutal as Wong Bik-Wan's *The Death of Lo Kei* (2018). Different people talked only to prove that, this person is a *Tongzhi* (therefore he took his own life); the life of him was being compressed into a series of seemingly objective facts [...] What did he say then? He said nothing. The archives said he left a letter saying “Please, please, tell my parents that it was an accident and I was a good Police Officer.” He said nothing and left a riddle of five gunshots in his body.

Being a lesbian myself, I learned from LGBTQ books that MacLennan is the first person being regarded as gay in Hong Kong's history. For a long time, the case is only a one-line story about a white man and a colonial authority to me, because of the lack of information (the archive is only released in the early 2000s). Only when I flip through and fragmented governmental documents and letters, I put together a story and it tells the repression that is still heart-breaking. It is a very special experience to feel emotions from reading archives, even the material itself is very official.

### 1.1.1.3 Colours of Colonial Past

I join the Behind the Scene Tour offered by the National Archives. When we are walking through the archives, an archivist explains how the files are being archived, stored and retrieved in the building. Due to the amount of archive, now the National Archives store some archives offsite, in the Cheshire salt mine.

Towards the end of the tour, they show various exemplary materials for visitors, including various documents from Japan, as well as anti-foreign publication in late Qing dynasty.

Those choices are made because of the attractive colours and illustrations in those publications. When I look closer, it is very hard for me not to associate the attitude of late Qing dynasty led to the fact that Hong Kong being colonised by the British<sup>1</sup>. People in the same tour are thrilled and they make many photographs in the tour, I guess I am the only one feeling emotional here.



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<sup>1</sup> After the first opium wars between Qing (China) and British Empire in 1941, Hong Kong Island was ceded to British Empire in the Treaty of Nanking in 1942.

## 0.1.2 Interviews

### 0.1.2.1 Closing Distance with Tteok-bokki

I meet J outside of the huge M&M store, where she takes me and another Hong Kong team member to the China Town. It is my first time visiting an Asian store in London, but it is just like the other Asian store in Rotterdam where I often go - in fact, that is the similar kind of attachment we share. We talk after cooking a pot Tteok-bokki (stir-fried Korean rice cakes) together in J's dormitory. She has been staying in London for almost 5 years,

“Being part of Decoding Hong Kong's History and social movement in the UK, far away, it closes the distance, because even I am not helping much, still I feel doing something like a comfort [to myself].” (see 3.1.2)

“Now I have more feelings towards history and understand better its importance. Before being part of the Decoding Hong Kong's History, I was easily dragged by the political situation or social issue at the moment, merely reacting on the situation. Now when I read the archives, the discussion was about the future of Hong Kong, in fact, it is the current moment of Hong Kong.” (see 3.1.2)

While I am listening to what she says, I also reexamine my relation to Hong Kong. The archives have become a way to close the physical distance of the UK and Hong Kong, as well as temporal one of past and current.



One thing strikes me, that is the urgency to do something being away. Such urgency to remember and commemorate is very common under state repression (Enwerzor 2007). That also resembles what S, a student in curatorial studies, describes to me another day, “I told my classmates from Korea and mainland China that I scanned the documents in the National Archives and uploaded them to a database. They are surprised [...] They have not many feelings towards that, as they don't have to do so.” (see 3.1.3)



### **0.1.2.2 Green Pea Mesh, or Non-linear History**

n the canteen of National Archives, I have a chat with C and B, they are two researchers from the Hong Kong team. After lunch with fish, chips and pea mesh, they have explained the situation of the Hong Kong colonial archives, that was being transferred to the National Archives in London before 1997.

C mentions how his memory becomes concrete from reading the archives,

“I was born in 1994, my first memories were in 1998 after the handover. [...] Though in 1998 one can still smell the aftertaste left from the UK rule, [...] that vague feeling becomes concrete when I read the archives.” (see 3.1.1)

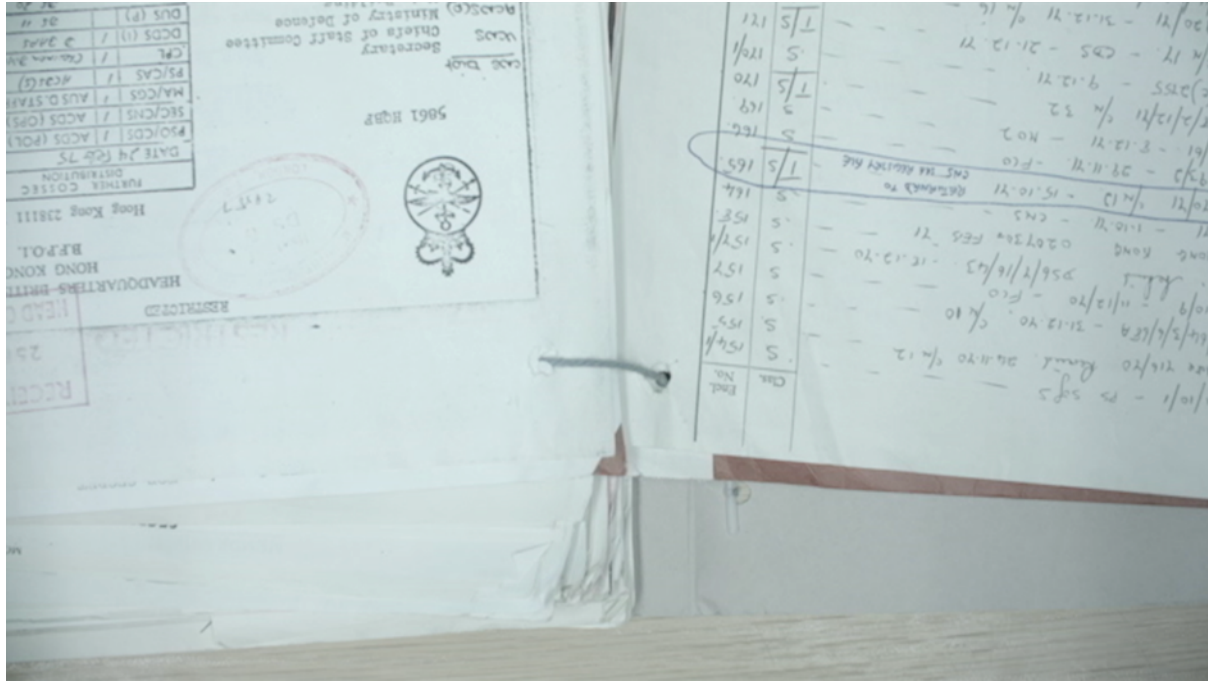
Of course, like most Hong Kong people I know, we have to carry a mixed feeling towards colonial times, on one hand, it implies a lot of inequalities, but still, it is far better than the current situation, yet, B is very conscious about the power relations related to the colonial archives.

It reminds me of the notion of seeing knowledge constructed by British Empire, as an intensive way to control its colony, that Thomas Richard described as “the fantasy of the imperial archive” (Richard 1993). The knowledge and archives accumulated in the National Archives is never a neutral one, but the expression of power relation. Hong Kong’s archives being owned by the British Government is also exemplifies of such control of knowledge, even it allows public access. Meanwhile, to read these colonial archives in a new light, can be a tactic for post-colonial bodies,

“If the establishment and consolidation of the empire were built on the accumulation of information about the people and places under colonial rule, one of the strategies adopted by postcolonial subjects has been to reinterpret and recontextualize the information and thus call into question the colonial version of events.” (Manoff 2004)

### 0.1.2.3 After thoughts

Aesthetically I have not decided anything before hand, apart from I would not use talking head of people. In a coincidence, when I first interview J in her dormitory, we decide to talk when we cook and eat. I film the process of that and find cooking as a mean to loosen up both the subject and myself. From there I prefer to cook or have a meal with the subjects before we go into the interview.



Later, I also realized that cooking can also relate to the act of scanning archives, for both involves a very tactile experience, and can be a mundane process if we divide them up into bits (like peeling vegetables, or stirring in a pot) – that almost reflects what the subjects describe their process of scanning documents – a mundane process to achieve something bigger. Therefore, after this first visit, I have made more footages over food, and the acts of cooking and sharing.

## 0.2 Second Visit (24 Nov 2018 to 3 Dec 2018)

### 0.2.1 Interviews

#### 0.2.1.1 All day breakfast

S set up a meeting with her friend M and me, in a place selling all-day breakfast in south London.

We talk over dishes with all sorts of different food, somehow that also reflects the kind of spectrum there: S was a professional handling the government archives, and M was a researcher; while M is a localist<sup>2</sup> involving in politics, S has more interest in visual arts. S is also aware of the spectrum,

“[...] among those who are unprofessional, because of diverse experience, people have different feelings towards [the act of] scanning documents.”

And somehow that also is a facet of what I want to explore in the project – how does personal experience relate public memory, in forms of archives?

M tells me about his experience of working with a small archive – that is the university hall archive. He certainly feels more belonged to the hall with the archives, and he sees this idea of creating identity from archives also works in the context of Hong Kong, “The identity is being created, and even when we are not aware of it, we are creating something.” He refers to Butler’s gender performativity that we are doing identity.

We finish the day with radish cake S bought from China town, and even by then we stop talking about the archives, maybe we are still doing such identity.



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<sup>2</sup> Localism is a political movement that aims to preserve its culture and autonomy, against the influence of China. It is associated with actions including anti-parallel trading protests and Mongkok unrest, many of these actions turned violent in the end. Despite they hold a rather leftist view on culture and land development issues, many localist groups are strongly against China and its people and disapprove the leftist political strategies.

### 0.2.1.2 Risotto and Unthinkable History

L is very critical on the politics and admires the works of the researchers she used to work within Hong Kong. She is very precise when cooking risotto for me, at the same time she dives into her own personal memory of activism. It is indeed amazing to hear her recite events and conversations with exact time and date.



When I ask her if there is a huge difference between working with archives, that are events in the past, and campaigning for election, what she used to do before, she questions,

‘What do you think is passed? What defines “happened”? There are many things in the archives we have never learned before.’

It may also explain the reason that it is extremely hard to feel from the archives, if we are still learning the history, in contrast to many works that are about generating new ways to think through history, the work I see here in London is still discovering the history. While many artists “interrogate the status of photographic archive as a historical site that exists between evidence and document, public memory and private history” (Enwezor 2007), we are still at the stage of excavation, not even owning a monument.

### 0.2.2 After thought

In fact, most core members of the initiative maintain a certain emotional distance with archives. That is something I want to bear in mind throughout the creative process, not to have my emotions overpowered the critical side of the archives. What I have initially pictured in my mind is rather resembles the romances of archives as what Suzanne Keen studied in her book – in which postcolonial people searching for their own identities after traveling to the archives (Keen 2001), instead of what these subjects do in their real lives.

Of course, it is hard to compare volunteers scanning archives (i.e. most subjects in the interviews), with professional researchers (i.e. C and B in the earlier interview), but that is something that has been lingered in my mind for a long time. There are people who have a lot of emotions (towards the situation, the distance and Hong Kong itself) while many researchers from the Decoding Hong Kong's History see archives merely as fragmented information that holds almost no sentiments themselves.

It is very obvious that I was beginning this project with a rather sentimental and personal approach, but since then I also have to look for ways to keep the critical side of archives, as many researchers and core members portray in the interviews.





### **0.3 Side Project – A Room of Oblivion**

In December 2018, I have pitched this project at a film festival with a trailer (see 0.0). Later a Portuguese film festival programmer asked if I envision the project to be a conventional documentary, then I realized something was missing in the material – my own perspective.

Then I decide to work on a side project with something seemingly has no relations with the National Archives - my own video archives. I look into my computer hard drive and find the material I filmed in 2006, on a trip with someone who later became my partner for 3 years.

The script is an extremely personal take on the reliability of memory, and the notion of forgetting (as the opposite to celebrating remembrance), while the low-resolution imagery certainly loses many details while processing (see the script at appendix 3.2). It is also a reflection on the mechanism of how different mediums “remember” or record.

After this project, I have drafted out a plan in putting together my own perspective and experience (thinking Hong Kong population would move to Ireland) with the material I have got from the previous visits, that ends up in a visit to Ireland, a place rooted in my memory since I was a kid (see 0.0).



#### **0.4 Third Visit (17 Feb 2019 – 24 Feb 2019)**

##### **0.4.1 The Northern Ireland**

###### **0.4.1.1 Giant's Causeway**

Giant's Causeway was a spot at the north coast of Northern Ireland. It was a spot covered in *Stories from Afar*, a Hong Kong TV series on Chinese diaspora, the subject mentioned she had a very different impression of Ireland from the scenery, compared to the conflict from news.



Screenshot from the Northern Ireland episodes of *Stories from Afar*

The major reason to visit there was to take mood shot that to illustrate the idea of floating city, given that the rocks can be a metaphor of floating city, as well as the possibility that Hong Kong might “float” to this place once in the history.

###### **0.4.2.1 Belfast's China Town**

In the morning, I walk from the city center to the area with Asian supermarket and Chinese restaurants. It is just a small street scattered with shops, which is much smaller than many China towns in Europe. It becomes very hard for me to imagine to live there, on an empty street with almost no one.

After checking out a bakery and an Asian supermarket, I spot the dim sum restaurant where *Stories from Afar* filmed the interviews. The interior has not changed much. When I am eating, I overhear conversations of a family sitting next to me, they talk about shopping in the afternoon and a trip to London. I take out my recorder and record that, accidentally I record a conversation between the waitress and them, that the restaurant is serving sweet soup with tangyang because of Lantern Festival.

I wonder if people care more about traditions and heritage when they live far away, in fact, that may also explain why I am filming as well.

### **0.4.3 London: National Archives**

Now I am staying in London for a few days, after being in North Ireland. Apart from interview, are there other ways to understand the people I met? I decide spending an entire day at the National Archives.

After lunch in the canteen, it is time to roll up my sleeves and start working. Having the documents in hands, I realize it is quite frustrating to scan – the scanning can be hard without a tripod, and not to mention the scanning app has errors from time to time. I can finally understand why a few subjects said there is nothing emotional about scanning documents since it is rather linear – to scan documents assigned by the researchers from the Hong Kong team. In order to scan as many as possible, one does not read into the archives. Even if one would, these archives are a series of fragmented information.

I manage to scan only three documents. The first one that is about capital punishment and the last one has a lot of maps and drawings. I acquire a few more documents and flip through them, one of those is about a princess visiting Japan and Hong Kong – however, everything related to Hong Kong is still unreleased. Now I am one of those who feel impossible to remember what I have scanned – since it is not real reading, but more like a repetitive task.

Later I see a familiar face in the archives, it is L teaching some new volunteers. I wait until later in the day to talk to her, she says, as a matter of fact, “Most of those people you have interviewed don’t show up anymore.”

I smile, and do not know what to say. She goes on scanning with a tripod device for mobile phones, and she gives me one.

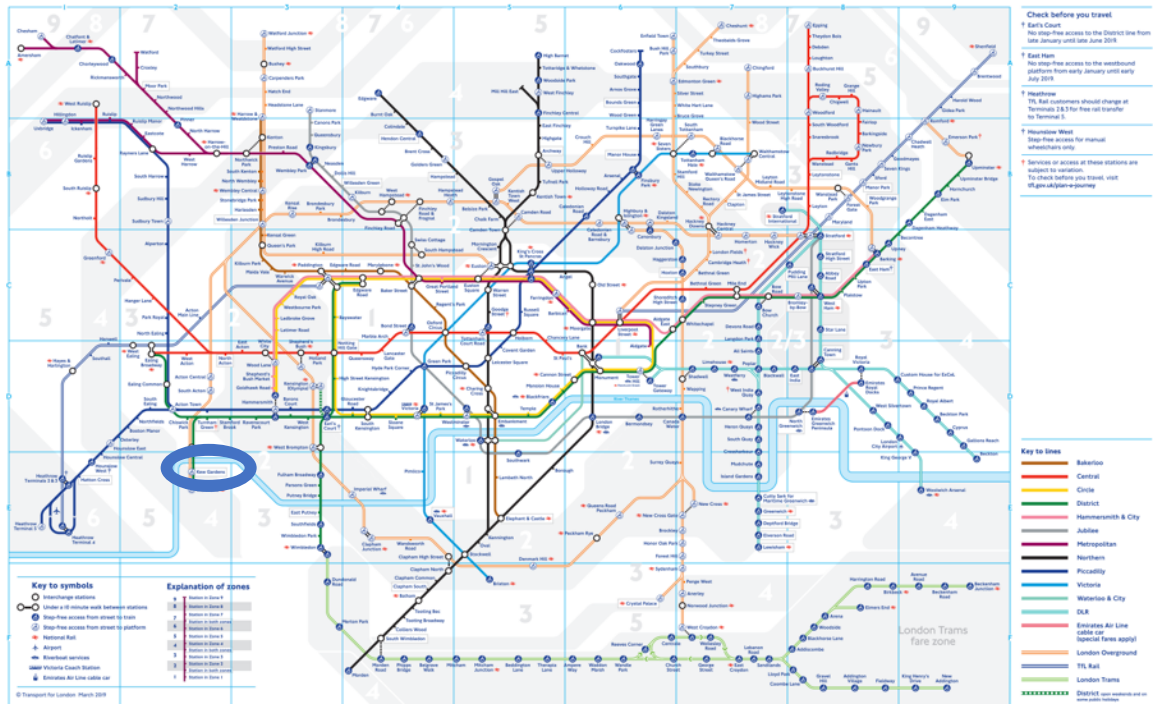
“You sure? I am not often in London.”

“It’s fine. Not many people are still coming here anyway.”

I feel very mixed, and we cannot deny that it takes some commitment to visit a place on the edge of Zone 3. I think to myself, if there is something this project should do, it is to show how these small efforts can end up into something meaning a lot.



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Tube Map of London with Kew Garden circled to show National Archive's location

## 1.1 Short introduction of Hong Kong colonial archives

*Walking towards the Sun* deals with the subject of Hong Kong colonial archives, hereby “colonial archive” refers to the governmental archives of British Hong Kong (1841–1941, 1945–1997). Part of the archives in this period are held in Public Record Office in Hong Kong, while many documents that related to higher level administration and Foreign and Commonwealth Office are held in the National Archives in Kew Garden, London (The National Archives).

### 1.1.1 Archives located in National Archives, London

Documents in United Kingdom are created, selected and transferred to the National Archives under the rule of Public Records Act 1958, and the right to access archives is protected by Freedom of Information Act 2000. As Public Records Act is revised in 2013, the government have to release records once they reach 20 years old instead of 30 years old (The National Archives). Meanwhile the British government also has right to not release the *exempt information* due to other reasons, for example, security matters, national security, deference, international relations and economy (Freedom of Information Act 2000).

However, in breach of the Public Record Act, a huge amount of colonial file was kept in a secret archive in Hanslope Park, until that was revealed by a released file (Lee, A. 2013). Upon the leak in 2013, the government has started transferring the special collection regarding colonies to the National Archives (Cobain, 2013). In a 2014 report, the Foreign Office estimated the 60,000 files would be transferred to the National Archives by the end of 2019 (Sillitoe, D. and Cobain, I., 2014).

Even so, according to *Decoding Hong Kong History*, there are more than 1,000 Hong Kong colonial files are still inaccessible to public as they fall into the category of exempt information in Freedom of Information Act 2000, the British government will only release these files after 29 to 100 years from now.

### 1.1.2 Archives located in Hong Kong

#### 1.1.2.1 Archives of Colonial Hong Kong

According to Don Brech, Hong Kong’s Public Records Office was set up by Australian archivist Ian Diamond in 1971. Upon Brech joining the office in 1987, the office extended its service to microfilming and recording so to provide British government the selected record (Brech, 2013).

In an interview, researchers from *Decoding Hong Kong’s History* mentioned that the British government might transfer most sensitive archives to the UK before the handover. Similar practice of removing archives has been seen in other colonies as well, if not completely destroy (Engelhart, 2014). For instance, the records on the riot happened in 1967 Hong Kong Leftist Riot were very limited in both Hong Kong Public Records Office and the UK National Archives (Ng, J. and Lam, J. 2017). There were discussions on if British Government owns the colonial files, but lawyers judged them belong to UK public records (Engelhart, 2014).

Less sensitive files are held at the city’s Government Records Service in Hong Kong for public access, according to the Public Records (Access) Rules 1996. It is important to note that even during the colonial period, archives storage was not really prioritized in the colonial government. The archives have been stored in various locations including mezzanine floor of the Murray Road Multi-storey Car Park Building, then to Sun Yik factory building in Tuen Mun, next to a storage of hazardous material (Lo, 2015). Only on 19 Jun 1997, less than half month before the handover, Government Records Service Building in Kwun Tong was opened to public.

#### 1.1.2.2 Archives of Post-1997 Hong Kong

Since the 2000s, there have been discussions on legislation of archives law in society and legislative council (Panel on Constitutional Affairs (Agenda) 17 May 2010). However, up until now when this thesis is written (Dec 2018), there is no Public Records Act in Hong Kong.

Currently Hong Kong only has the Code on Access to Information that suggests a framework for access the information held by the government department (Code on Access to Information), however the code does not provide legal right to appeal if the request to access information is being rejected by the government (Li, 2010), the code is also being seen as mandatory requirements, and has no penalties to those choose to not comply (Loh, C. and Frisch, N., 2011). For instance, in 2005 the immigration department claimed that they have lost all documents related to the denial of a group of Falun Gong practitioners from entering Hong Kong. In 2011 the government has destroyed a mass of paper records, if they were piled up that would be three times higher than the IFC building (1,362 ft) (V.L 2013).

Only very recently, Hong Kong Law Reform Commission has proposed an introduction of archives law without harsh penalty (Chen, H. 2018).

## 2. Works related to Archives

### 2.1 *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Muriel ou le Temps d'un retour*, *Toute la mémoire du monde* - Alain Resnais / *Les statues meurent aussi* - Alain Resnais, Chris Marker

At the summer of 2018, I was at the summer school of *Roffa Mon Amour Film Festival*, and from there I started watching many films from Alain Resnais. The idea of working with archives just emerged in my mind while listening to a speaker talking about the notion of time in his film, how the past, present and future loop into each other. The idea came to me when I was watching *Hiroshima mon amour*, the characters wandering in a museum showcasing photographs of atomic bombings, that brings a fictional story into a historical context.



Screenshot from *Toute la mémoire du monde*

Films including *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Muriel ou le Temps d'un retour*, *Toute la mémoire du monde* and *Les statues meurent aussi* all represents archival materials in the visual one way or another. For instance, in *Hiroshima mon amour*, it is the images displayed in the museum; and in *Toute la mémoire du monde*, it is the library and the material it possesses.

The imagery of archives reminds me of the photographs I have seen on Facebook page of *Decoding Hong Kong's History* – papers and documents with unique textures of histories and memories, but there is one thing that could not be seen from these images, was Resnais's gaze on the tactility of archives, for example, the close-up shots of fingers flipping the letters and notes in *Muriel ou le Temps d'un retour*, and walking through the exhibition in *Hiroshima mon amour*, which show not only an intellectual understanding but a physical relation with archives.

After that, I decide to show this physical relation of us as colonized people, with these colonial archives. It is not merely a nostalgic emotion, but as well an institutional memory,

“I had a part-time job at Home Affairs Office [...] when I get the documents, it reminds me of the experience in Home Affairs Office. [...] they would use pencil to mark on the right top hand corner, 1, 2, 3... [...] If you want to read the earliest one, you have to read from the bottom, there is a directory on the top, and it is also hand-written.” (see 3.1.6)

Even the project now looks entire different from most Resnais's works I have listed here, still it carries the question of time and memory, and the physical touch with archival material.

## 2.2 *Death of Lo-Kei* – Wong Bik-Wan

I began to read the book *Death of Lo-Kei* on the train to London of my first visit. Before I have started, I heard many people on social media mentioned the difficulty to follow the narrative in the book.

It is not the first time for Wong writing a fiction based on facts, but *Death of Lo-Kei* directly refers to archival material, to be more accurate, Wong directly borrow the text from archives to create a fiction. The book was about a young man named Lo-Kei, who had protested for an increase of ferry ticket price in 1966, found dead in a friend's apartment a year later.

Wong goes back and forth on texts gathered from different sources, and challenges the reliability and validity of archival materials, under the colonial rule. The readability issue is probably on purpose as the text is very fragmented, referring to historical sources at times – meanwhile that resembles to the experience of reading archival material (which I later realized when I first read material in National Archives, where Wong sourced material for the book).

I finished reading in the St Pancras station before going back to Rotterdam, the last chapter is a relatively short one but it had a huge emotional impact on me, which Wong explicitly points to the case of Edward Leung Tin-Kei in 2016, in which Leung was being convicted of the unrest known as Mongkok Riot. The book becomes as well a rare political statement from Wong through overlapping these two events in one book.

While being in London is relatively comfortable since that resembles to what I became used to as a child. That makes me question if it is impossible to unlearn and decolonize our thoughts and knowledge, given that we do not even owe our own city and archives?

While those decolonization tactics mentioned in 2.3 cannot be applied to the Hong Kong context, the colonialism students mentioned in Ann Laura Stoler's *Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance* are applying some rather practical options: rereading, doing oral histories with people lived those events, doing such oral histories with photography and documentary, reflecting on how these archives are being reuse to “confirm old entitlement or make new political demands” (Stoler 2002)

Even for now it seems impossible for us to reclaim the physical archives, not to say re-categorize and dis-couple it with the colonial narrative, still as what Stoler suggests we can be aware of archives as subject of colonial power. Wong's attempt suggests a possibility to reflect on these information in the documents and its power relations through writing, and relate it to our situation now.

### 2.3 *In the Dark Room* – Brian Dillon

The book by Brian Dillon is a memoir and reflection on his own life, based on objects and places. He goes into detailed description on objects, and reflects on his own traumatic childhood of losing both parents.

Similar to *Memory Theater* written by Simon Critchley (see 2.6), Dillon also refers to the classical art of memory, (Dillon 2018). Unlike Critchley who builds a theatre in his fiction, Dillon interprets the notion with the house he grew up in and lost both parents, while each object left by his parents carries a fragment, a story, or an emotion. Dillon's relation to objects are rather personal and its position interchange between a proof or an artifact of his personal memory, and the metaphor of memory. Objects also can interact with memory, in his own mind. For instance, this description of an ashtray:

"I have started long enough at my father's ashtray for it to have disappeared again. It falls back, buried, this time, not beneath the chaos of other objects, but under a pile of memories which cling to it like ancient ash." (85)

While the ashtray switches its position from being a proof of memory, into a metaphor for that. What about archives? Whenever I read the archive in London, I am actually flipping through the pile of memory.

People are familiar with the idea of archives as a metaphor of memory in the west. When Wolfgang Ernst argues that European cultural memory is archive-based, and the trans-Atlantic ones are transfer-based, which opens for public for circulation (Ernst 2004, such concept of archive never appeared in Pre-modern China. Even the ruling dynasty usually held a huge archive, they were usually demolished when the dynasty falls. In ancient China, the historians in government had the absolute power to determine which archives would be kept by writing them into the histories (Liang 1922). This resulted in a selective and fragmented archive that is short-lived and only serving for the ruling power.

If the colonial archive in London is a metaphor, then what does it represent?

"It has to do with the fact that Hong Kong people have no opportunity to control their own fate, as a colony. Most colonies would go for independence, but the situation of Hong Kong is very unique. A lot of documents would also be missing – loss during transferring, or being burnt and destroy. The situation of Hong Kong is not comparable to any cases in the world." (3.1.1)

There are essays suggesting different ways to decolonize archives. For instance, Wolfgang Ernst suggests to detach and deconstruct the archives to prevent archives functioning as a historical narrative for the state (Ernst 2016), meanwhile Jeffrey Schnapp looks into archiving strategy to manage archives (Schnapp 2016). While these essays presume the colonized people share ownership of the colonial archives, exactly that is the core of its problematic nature. Hong Kong does not own the archives before 1997, neither the government after 1997 ensures we have our own archives under Beijing's rule.

Maybe it simply represents our lack of subjectivity and control of the historical discourses – and we even do not have the material to reconstruct one.

## **2.4 *Carrying Yours and Standing Between You* - Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa**

During the second field visit to London, I have visited the exhibition titled *Women on Aeroplanes* in The Showroom. One of the works is from Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, with the title *Carrying Yours and Standing Between You*. It is an archival installation that consists of wooden tables and documents on her findings about the Pan-African activist Amy Ashwood Garvey.

The installation showcases documents, newspaper, as well as personal material, for instance, letter between Wolukau-Wanambwa and research center on black culture, images taken while Wolukau-Wanambwa seeking for the cemetery that buried Garvey's body.

These materials and the way of display create a space for reader to tap into the life of Garvey as an activist figure, and reflect on the marginalization of such woman figure in the activism, from the lack of archival material, or lack of recognition within the sphere of archives. The exhibition has been inspiring in the way she presents her own findings alongside with material from lectures, books and news. The exhibition subtly interweaves personal critical views and emotion in public archives.

When I was there reading in the exhibition, I was very much inspired by her way of recovering the loss information of a historical figure - and as Arjun suggests, the loss of memory usually contributes to the urgency of archiving, even his example for that is immigrants, but it applies to all marginalized groups, for "archive is a guide to the uncertainties of identity-building under adverse conditions." (Appadurai 2003) I realize my own project is not only about how memories and archives interlace, but rather it is still a quest to our own identities as Hong Kongers, or in my own situation, a Hong Konger away from home.

The work also is an example of rearrange or reorder archives. While *Carrying Yours and Standing Between You* is an archive of archives, this thesis which you are reading, is as well an archive of archives. While the project will result in a moving image that is time-based, this thesis is a work that readers can read in their own pace.

## 2.5 *The Years* – Annie Ernaux

*The Years* is a memoir by French writer Annie Ernaux. To experiment the form of collective memoir, each chapter of the book begins with a detailed description of a photograph, then moves on to personal memory, as well as political and popular culture. Narrator switches spontaneously from 'she' to 'we', at times referring to herself and people around her, she said, "There is no 'I' in what she views as a sort of impersonal autobiography. There is only 'one' and 'we', as if now it were her time to tell the story of the time-before." (Elkin)

Even though the book is a memoir, Ernaux questions that our understanding to the world and memory are controlled by government, media and even popular trends. Ernaux also made several statements on the notion of memory including,

"Like sexual desire, memory never stops. It pairs the dead with the living, real with imaginary beings, dreams with history." (Ernaux 2017)

"Of all the ways in which self-knowledge maybe fostered, perhaps one of the greatest is a person's ability to discern how they view the past, at every time of life and every age." (Ernaux 2017)

While the word memory appears again and again in the book, but what exactly does it mean?

Maybe the notion of involuntary memories can explain the role of memory in *The Years*. Scott Lash in his interview explains the notion, which originated in Benjamin's *The Image of Proust*, as lost images and lost times in one's unconscious, yet one is still trying to reach. Lash further illustrates its meaning with examples of forgotten mother and childhood – that are important in forming what one is. He suggests collective memory is as well a form of involuntary memory. These forgotten memories and past are part of identity, and what we make sense of the world with (Lash 2003).

The more I am working on the project, the more I realise that even the archives contain many information, yet what is common between *The Years* and people tell in interviews, is that they are rather involuntary memories of a sight, an event, that can never be fully recovered. But still, my own project and Ernaux's book are an attempt to make sense of the world through web-weaving as what Lash suggests. Therefore, the film should as well be a web weaved with threads from the colonial archive and personal involuntary memories – even at loss, and ultimately that is an attempt to make sense of the situation now.

That, I think, is actually something I want to trigger my audience to do. It is impossible for the film to become a complete archive itself, but it can become an archive at loss, and invite audience to reach inside themselves for deeper, personal material – and in the end, to make sense of the situation.



## 2.6 Memory Theatre – Simon Critchley

I only start reading this book when I reworking on *A Room of Oblivion*, and reading the book about the art of memory. Instead of illustrating the idea of memory theatre, as what I expected from the book before reading, Critchley takes an interesting turn to start with a personal narrative – of himself finding boxes in his office from a dead French philosopher friend. He opens those boxes and begins to analysis and reflect on the idea discussed there, including memory theatre and various philosophy.

The book is entirely about memory, but is written to show instead of tell.

Its structure is particularly interesting– the writer blends the factual history of memory theatre, with the fictional and personal aspect of his life. While the setting of the story – those boxes contains notes and essays – itself circles back to the idea of memory and constructs a memory theatre, at the same time, the writer himself reflects on his own loss of memory after an accident. In the end, the two lines join together, of the writer himself fulfilling the astrology chart left by the dead philosopher, and building his own memory theatre in Den Bosch – where he would die as predicted by the philosopher.

It is like a Moebius strip - as Marina Warner points out in the forward.

There are times when I am reading the book thinking, if the project takes its form as a book instead, then it would be a perfect structure for it.

How can I show my relations with archives?

For now, when I work on the script, that is also a structure that I would like to create – while Critchley has a structure mixing theory with fictional story, my moving image would be interweaved by my own experience and others in form of interview. And these dialogues of mine and other people, should all circle back into the notion of how our memories, as when we talk, are shaped by histories. For instance, it is inevitable to refer to childhood memories when people talk about the handover of Hong Kong in interviews,

“I was 1 in 1997. I was born in 1996, one year before the handover. I have BN(O). I have very blurry memory of the handover, but on the streets, I could see what the colonial past left.” (see 3.1.2)

“When I read the files, it feels like reliving the history. I was born in 1988, of course I cannot remember anything from 1980s, but I can remember the mass migrant wave – we used to go to the airport a lot. In the early 1990s, relatives and my mother’s friends moved to Canada and UK, we often went to airport to say goodbye. [...] A few days ago, I came across the files on the mass migrant wave. [...] My childhood memories can be read from the archives, and I can understand what have happened by then in the archives. That complements my memory in the past.” (see 3.1.1)

These fragments in film are the threads to interweave the web of memories, and offer a context where memories and archives interact with each other, where we cannot only talk about one without the other.

#### 4. Conclusion

Throughout the research, my understanding of archives has been reshaped from seeing it merely as public memory and a romantic imagination of traveling through time, into an empire's knowledge of its territory, and a possibility for the colonized people to reinterpret their own identities and histories.

In the interviews, almost everyone mentioned the impact of Umbrella Movement. Its failure divides the Hong Kongers. Revisiting the history can be a new possibility different from the existing forms of activism, as what U mentioned in his interview,

“[...] what it [*Decoding Hong Kong's History*] is trying to reconstruct Hong Kong's subjectivity, and the understanding of Hong Kong's history. That is something we have to do no matter we are leftist and rightist.” (see 3.1.5)

The search for subjectivity.

That sums up the project and responses to many of those existing archives theories – that presumes people owning the archives. We don't. We are being rejected from it.

When Stoler sees her essay questioning “what insights about the colonial might be gained from attending not only to colonialism's archival content, but to its particular and sometimes peculiar form” (Stoler 2002), the film and this thesis are searching what can be resulted from such peculiar form of colonial archives.

The quest of lost memories has been one going through others' creative process and also these physical journeys made to London and the North Ireland. The quest is not going to stop at the film, but hopefully will be continued by the audience and readers. It can be taken in form of going to the physical archives or advocating their archives to provide better access, or even just going through their own personal archives and reflecting on one's own histories.

Such search is never an easy one, because it can be hard to face these historical events - that reminds me of the first day when walking out from the National Archive. The Autumn's sun was shining on to our faces. I saw the silhouettes of fellow Hong Kongers who left from the Archive.

It was a powerful moment.

There were times I felt working on this subject alone in a foreign country, but then when I remember that moment, when we were walking towards the sun together, because we were together in this struggling against forgetting.

*The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. – Milan Kundera*

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